



Exhibit A

Original Article: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/weight-loss/HQ01160>

Weight-loss pills: What can diet aids do for you?

It's the latest weight-loss pill or herbal supplement that has people talking and you wondering whether it really works. Certainly the appeal of losing weight quickly is hard to pass up.

But do these pills and products lighten anything but your wallet? And are they a safe option for weight loss? Here's a look at some over-the-counter weight-loss pills and what they will and won't do for you.

Popular weight-loss pills

A number of weight-loss pills are available at your local drugstore, supermarket or health food store. Even more options are available online. Most haven't been proved safe and effective, and some are downright dangerous.

Herbal or dietary supplement	The claims	What you need to know
Bitter orange	Decreases appetite	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Touted as an "ephedra substitute" but may cause health problems similar to those of ephedra• Long-term effects unknown
Chitosan	Blocks the absorption of dietary fat	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Relatively safe, but unlikely to cause weight loss• Can cause constipation, bloating and other gastrointestinal complaints• Long-term effects unknown
Chromium	Reduces body fat and builds muscle	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Relatively safe, but unlikely to cause weight loss• Long-term effects unknown
Conjugated	Reduces body fat, decreases	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Might decrease body fat and increase muscle, but isn't likely to reduce total body

linoleic acid (CLA)	appetite and builds muscle	weight <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can cause diarrhea, indigestion and other gastrointestinal problems
Country mallow (heartleaf)	Decreases appetite and increases the number of calories burned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contains ephedra, which is dangerous • Likely unsafe and should be avoided
Ephedra	Decreases appetite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can cause high blood pressure, heart rate irregularities, sleeplessness, seizures, heart attacks, strokes and even death • Banned from the marketplace because of safety concerns, but may still be legally sold as a tea • Despite the ban, many ephedra products still sold on the Internet
Green tea extract	Increases calorie and fat metabolism and decreases appetite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited evidence to support the claim • Can cause vomiting, bloating, indigestion and diarrhea • May contain a large amount of caffeine
Guar gum	Blocks the absorption of dietary fat and increases the feeling of fullness, which leads to decreased calorie intake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatively safe, but unlikely to cause weight loss • Can cause diarrhea, flatulence and other gastrointestinal problems
Hoodia	Decreases appetite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No conclusive evidence to support the claim

In addition to these herbal or dietary supplements, the Food and Drug Administration has approved a reduced-strength over-the-counter (nonprescription) version of orlistat (Alli), a prescription weight-loss medication for adults age 18 and older. Alli promotes weight loss by decreasing absorption of fat by the intestines. The capsules are taken with meals, up to three times a day. It sounds like a dieter's dream, but there are no shortcuts to permanent weight loss. Alli is intended to be used only with a reduced-calorie, low-fat diet and regular exercise.

The pitfalls of pills

Dietary supplements and weight-loss aids aren't subject to the same rigorous standards as are prescription drugs or medications sold over-the-counter. Thus, they can be marketed with limited proof of effectiveness or safety. Vendors can make health claims about products based on their own review and interpretation of studies without the authorization of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). However, the FDA can pull a product off the market if it's proved dangerous.

For the consumer, it's hard to know what you're getting, or even if the list of ingredients matches what's in the bottle. Many weight-loss pills contain a cocktail of ingredients — some with more than 20 herbs, botanicals, vitamins, minerals or other add-ons, such as caffeine or laxatives. How these ingredients interact individually and collectively with your body is largely unknown. And using them can be a risky venture, especially if you're taking other medications.

Your own scrutiny and curiosity are your best protection. Read labels closely and talk with your doctor or pharmacist about any dietary supplements you're taking or considering taking.

No quick fix

There's no magic bullet for losing weight. The only way to lose weight and keep it off is through indefinite lifestyle changes: Eat healthier, low-calorie foods, watch portion sizes, and engage in regular physical activity. It's certainly no magic pill, but it works.

Keep in mind that even if you take a weight-loss pill, you still have to eat fewer calories than your body uses in order to lose weight. Even if these products were to help you lose weight initially, you'd have to continue taking them for the weight to stay off, which is neither practical nor safe.

If you are concerned about your weight or have a condition that's exacerbated by extra pounds, talk to your doctor. Whether you have 10 pounds or 100 pounds to lose, you need to eat a healthy diet based on a variety of foods and burn calories through physical activity. Time has shown that there truly are no easy solutions to losing weight. And over-the-counter weight-loss pills could cause more harm than good.

By Mayo Clinic Staff
May 31, 2007

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HQ01160